

ONEIDA STORY  
(As printed in the Press-Gazette, 1954)

PART I

Editor, Press-Gazette: a few weeks ago a tribal meeting was held by the Oneidas and a representative of the Indian Department regarding the annual payments due the Oneidas. The proposition was put up to the Oneidas to accept a lump sum of \$60,000 in lieu of the annual stipend of 51 cents. This was rejected by the Oneidas and a good reason was given for not accepting it now.

Permit me as a friend and past pastor for 22 years of the Oneida Methodist Church to give something of the history and background of this and other treaties between the Oneidas and the government in the early days of our country. This may clarify many points and explain the present attitude and procedure of the Oneidas at this time.

The history of the Oneidas is long, interesting and unique. It came into prominence as a charter member of the Iroquois Confederacy about the year 1870. The purpose of this confederacy was to establish peace among the many Indian tribes then engaged in constant warfare among themselves.

The most important grouping on the continent, north of Mexico, from the very beginning of European conquest on through and after the American Revolution was the Confederacy of the Iroquois. Its influence and domain reached from the Atlantic Ocean in the east to the Mississippi River in the west, from Canada in the north to North Carolina in the south. It is sometimes referred to as the League of Five Nations - Mohawk, Oneida, Seneca, Cayuga, and Onondaga. Later the Oneidas invited the landless Tuscaroras to come and live and share with them. From then on it was known as the Six Nations. Other tribes were urged to join but were discouraged by the French who already feared and felt the power of the Iroquois Confederacy, ally of the English and the Dutch. The French organized other Indian tribes to fight on their side but with little success.

So effective was this wilderness democracy that Benjamin Franklin recommended that the United States model its government after the League of the Iroquois. Two hundred years of this Indian democracy was so successful that the early and scattered white settlers were convinced that it might work with them as they were then planning to organize against British rule.

Came the Revolution and the Declaration of Independence. The British counted on full support of their Indian allies. But the Oneidas declared for neutrality. They had accepted the white man's religion, thanks to the missionary Samuel Kirkland. Chief Skenandoah had been converted to christianity sometime before. He and his people decided that it was the white man's war and they would not join either side. The other tribes served the British. But it was not long before the Oneidas found it necessary to defend themselves against the Tories, and even against their former allies. These invaded the territory of the Oneidas, destroying their gardens, fields, burning their crops and leaving their people in destitute condition.

It was then that they were urged by Chief Skenandoah to defend themselves. They offered their services to General Schuyler. He preferred to use them scouting, for which they were peculiarly adapted. Their knowledge of the country and their ability to move among the enemy without being detected as a great advantage. About 200 were thus employed. They fought at the battle of Oriskany and the battle of Saratoga, which was the turning-point of the American Revolution.

At one time during the war, in an address to the Six Nations, Congress thus acknowledged the loyalty of the Oneidas: "You have kept fast hold of the ancient covenant chain and kept it from rust and decay. You stood forth in the cause of your friends and ventured your lives in our battles."

"Among the soldiery at Valley Forge were a party of Oneida Indians from the only tribe or 'nation' of the Iroquois Confederation allied with the Continental Army. The aborigines were employed largely as scouts."

Valley Ford Park. A historical record and guide book.

J. H. Wenberg  
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January 12, 1954

## PART II

Editor, Press-Gazette: At the close of the war (Revolution) everybody was poverty-stricken, especially the new-born Congress. For a long time the people, whites and Indians, lived on hopes and promises, until better days. Congress appreciated the good work, services and sacrifices of all who fought so valiantly to bring about victory to a new nation that was born.

A few years later, about 1794, a treaty was made with the Oneida's whereby they were to receive a stipulated amount annually "forever". When making this treaty it is possible and even probably that it was just a token of appreciation and that coming generations could and would increase this amount, when in a better condition to do so. Unfortunately, this has not been done. On the contrary, in value they are receiving less than ever. Now the government wants to call quits. The Oneidas are not ready to accept until other matters now pending before the Court of Claims are settled. At the close of the Revolution the Oneidas did receive \$4,500 for orchards, grain and other crops destroyed by the enemy.

After the war hundreds, thousands of Europeans entered the country, generally settling in the east, crowding the Indians more and more. The Indians were urged to go west promising them equal or more land there. But the west was already inhabited by Indians.

Finally a group of Oneidas, led by their missionary Eleazer Williams, left for the Northeast Territory, now Wisconsin. This was about 1821. Here they settled, built homes and Episcopal churches.

The government has procured from the Menominees about 5,00,000 acres for the Oneida reservation. A few years later the Old Orchard Party, or Methodist group, arrived and settled on the south bank of the Fox River where there was much timber and good fishing. It is now the present site of Kimberly. They cleared some land, plowed and sowed, built homes and a place of worship, also used for school. The government had the land surveyed, allotted and platted. This was in 1834-1835. In 1938 the Wisconsin Conference Historical Society erected a marker with the inscription: "On this ground then called Smithfield, the first Methodist Episcopal church between Lake Michigan and the Pacific Ocean was dedicated Sunday, September 16, 1832 as a house of worship and school for the Oneida Indians." 'Erected by the Wisconsin Conference Historical Society 1938.' This marker is on the property of the Kimberly-Clark Paper Company.

On the opposite side of the river stands another marker with the inscription: "Near this site September 3, 1836 the Menominee Indians ceded to the United States by the Treaty of the Cedars four million acres between the Fox, Wolf and Menominee Rivers. Signed by Henry Dodge, Territorial Governor, Oshkosh, Menominee Head Chief."

About this time the government expropriated most of the land previously ceded to the Oneidas in exchange for their New York lands, leaving them only 65,000 acres. To make the deal a legal transaction the Oneidas were paid \$33,000 for the 435,000 acres, or \$.77 (seven cents seven mills) per acre. This matter is now before the Court of Claims. When this is settled satisfactorily the minor matter of the annual stipend of 50 cents per member will probably soon follow.

J. H. Wenberg  
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January 13, 1954

### PART III

Editor, Press Gazette: The Oneidas have served in every major war since the birth of our nation. In the War of 1812 they again volunteered. Came the Civil War, but the Indians, being wards of the government, could not be drafted. This did not deter the Indians from enlisting. About 110 Oneidas volunteered. Oneidas, Stockbridges, and Munsees have lost a great portion of their enlisted men in military service." Report of the Condition of the Indian Tribes. Appendix-1867.

In World War I about 150 Oneidas took part, several paid with their lives. In World War II 250-300 Oneidas served their country in the air, on land and sea. Ten died in the service of their country. This is twice the average for this country as a whole. One of the first casualties of the Korean War was Valder John, Oneida. Early in the war he was taken prisoner, and was in that first group of American prisoners being conducted to a prison camp of the Reds, but never arrived. Instead, they were lined up and machine-gunned and left for dead. Three or four were seriously wounded but survived among them Valder John. He worked his way back to camp, was hospitalized, sent home to recuperate, and is now in the service again.

The Oneidas now own less than 3,000 acres, or average of 4/5 of an acre per member.

There is no record of the Oneida tribe ever having raised the tomahawk, or aimed its arrows against our people or nation. On the contrary, has always come to its defense. Such allegiance merits our highest esteem. We owe a great debt, legal and moral, to the Oneida tribe that deserves full recognition and recompense on our part.

After 175 years of such loyalty, service and sacrifice, the recognition and commendation of our first Congress has lost none of its luster and power: "Brothers, Oneidas and Tuscaroras -- Hearken to what we have to say to you in particular. It rejoices our hearts that we have no reason to reproach you in common with the rest of the Six Nations. We have experienced your love, strong as the oak, and your fidelity, unchangeable as truth. You have kept fast hold of the ancient covenant chain, and preserved it free from rust and decay, and bright as silver. Like brave men, for glory you despised danger; you stood forth in the cause of your friends, and ventured your lives in our battles. While the sun and moon continue to give light to the world, we shall love and respect you. As our faithful friends we shall protect you, and shall at all times consider your welfare as our own."

Long before the Revolutionary War the Oneidas were friendly toward all whites, except the French.

ONEIDAS AND MOHAWKS. "In July of 1684 an important treaty was concluded at Albany. The governors of New York and Virginia were met in convention by the sachem of the Iroquois, and the terms of a lasting peace was settled. A long war ensued between the Five Nations and the French. The Jesuits of Canada employed every artifact and intrigue to induce the Indians to break their treaty with the English, but to no purpose; the alliance was faithfully observed. In 1684 and again in 1687, the French invaded the territory of the Iroquois; but the mighty Mohawks and Oneidas drove back their foes with loss and disaster. By the barrier of the friendly Five Nations on the north, the English and Dutch colonies were screened from danger." History of the United States. J. C. Ridpath.

After 270 years of friendship and loyalty, service and sacrifice, the Oneidas have 3,000 acres left, and an annual stipend of fifty cents per member for all their labors, and now the government finds it a burden to pay this.

(Concluded.)  
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